

First record of Souimanga Sunbird *Cinnyris souimanga* as a host of Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus rochii*, at Ankamenabe, Madagascar

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Première donnée du Souimanga malgache *Cinnyris souimanga* parasité par le Coucou malgache *Cuculus rochii*, à Ankamenabe, Madagascar. Cette note rapporte la première observation d'un jeune Coucou malgache *Cuculus rochii* nourri par un couple de Souimangas malgaches *Cinnyris souimanga*, dans la zone d'extension du Parc National de Tsimanapetsotsa, sud de Madagascar, le 7 décembre 2010.

The endemic Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus rochii* has been reported as brood parasite of at least nine bird species: Grey-crowned Greenbul *Bernieria cinereiceps* (Hawkins & Goodman 2003), possibly Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus* (Milon 1959), Madagascar Brush Warbler *Nesillas typica* (Sikora 1892), *Acrocephalus* warblers (Davies 2000), Common Jery *Neomixis tenella* (Fry *et al.* 1988, Langrand 1990), Madagascar Cisticola *Cisticola cherina* (Sikora 1892, Milon 1959, Fry *et al.* 1988, Langrand 1990), Madagascar Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone mutata* (Milon 1959, Fry *et al.* 1988, Langrand 1990), Souimanga Sunbird *Cinnyris souimanga* (Fry *et al.* 1988, Payne 1997) and possibly White-headed Vanga *Leptopterus viridis* (Wilmé 1994). Some of the host records are doubtful and possibly were repeated from previous sources. We did not find a trustworthy original description of the Souimanga Sunbird being a host of the Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo and do not know from where Fry *et al.* (1988) and Payne (1997) acquired their information. Baron (1881) describes a Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo egg he found in the nest of a Souimanga Sunbird, along with three sunbird eggs. Milon (1959) doubts this record because the >100 clutches of Souimanga Sunbirds he found consisted of two eggs, with only a single clutch of three eggs. He therefore suggested that the Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo egg Baron described was found in a nest of *Cisticola cherina*. Therefore, our record may be the first.

On 7 December 2010, we observed a young Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo being fed by a pair of Souimanga Sunbirds in their nest at Ankamenabe (24°10'09"S 43°56'10"E; 165 m), within Tsimanampetsotsa National Park, southern Madagascar (Figs. 1–2). The nest was



Figure 1. Male Souimanga Sunbird *Cinnyris souimanga* with Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus rochii* chick inside the nest, Ankamenabe, southern Madagascar, 7 December 2010 (A. Solohery Rasamison)

Souimanga malgache *Cinnyris souimanga*, mâle, avec jeune Coucou malgache *Cuculus rochii* dans le nid, Ankamenabe, sud de Madagascar, 7 décembre 2010 (A. Solohery Rasamison)

80 cm above the ground in a deciduous bush that, at the time, had no leaves. The nestling was already fully feathered and exhibited the typical black-and-white barring (Fig. 3). To feed the young cuckoo, the Souimanga Sunbirds had to perch on the border of the entrance. Shortly after landing on the rim of the nest, the sunbirds would regurgitate some unknown type of food into the nestling's mouth. When the sunbirds approached the nest, the cuckoo emitted a hissing sound and opened its bill, revealing its bright red gape. This behaviour appeared to somewhat alarm the sunbirds so that they only spent a short time feeding the chick, moved away from the nest



Figure 2. Female Souimanga Sunbird *Cinnyris souimanga* at the parasitised nest, Ankamenabe, southern Madagascar, 7 December 2010 (A. Solohery Rasamison)
Souimanga malgache *Cinnyris souimanga*, femelle, au nid parasité, Ankamenabe, sud de Madagascar, 7 décembre 2010 (A. Solohery Rasamison)



Figure 3. Madagascar Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus rochii* chick inside the nest of Souimanga Sunbird *Cinnyris souimanga*, Ankamenabe, southern Madagascar, 7 December 2010 (A. Solohery Rasamison)

Jeune Coucou malgache *Cuculus rochii* dans le nid d'un Souimanga malgache *Cinnyris souimanga*, Ankamenabe, sud de Madagascar, 7 décembre 2010 (A. Solohery Rasamison)

briefly and then approached again to continue feeding. The nest was observed from a distance for 90 minutes. During this time the male provided food three times (mean feeding bout = 3 seconds $\pm$ 1), whereas the female fed the chick ten times

(mean = 2.8 seconds $\pm$ 0.2). The female was also seen removing a faecal sac from inside the nest. No trace of the Souimanga Sunbird eggs or chicks was found in the vicinity of the nest. If there had been any such remains they probably would have been taken by scavengers, as the cuckoo chick was already well grown. A short sequence of the male Souimanga Sunbird feeding the cuckoo chick is also available on film.

Souimanga Sunbird is mainly nectarivorous but also feeds on small insects, such as beetles, wasps and bugs, or other arthropods, such as spiders, which are gleaned from leaves or spider webs (Morris & Hawkins 1998, Cheke & Mann 2008). Invertebrate prey is especially important for rearing young. Sunbirds appear to be rather small to provide sufficient food for a cuckoo chick and their nest is also rather small with a usually narrow opening. Sikora (1892) doubts that sunbirds could host *Cuculus rochii* but our record now provides solid evidence for this. It may be less surprising if one considers that among >100 species parasitised by Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* are small species such as Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* and some *Phylloscopus* warblers (Cramp 1985, Glutz von Blotzheim & Bauer 1980). For none of the four *Cuculus* species breeding in Africa has a species of Nectariniidae been reported as host, but *Chrysococcyx* spp., which are smaller than *Cuculus* spp., are known to parasitise sunbirds (Fry *et al.* 1988).

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